DWBelin/mcy/5-15-64

Investigation and Evidence

MEMORANDUM

May 15, 1964

TO: J. Lee Rankin

FROM: David W. Belin

SUBJECT: May 7-9 Trip to Dallas with Commission Members

This is a summary report of my trip to Dallas with Commission members Senator John Sherman Cooper, John J. McCloy, and Allen W. Dulles. Mr. Dulles did not arrive until approximately 1:00 p.m. on Friday, May 8, so it somewhat interfered with the over-all itinerary for the trip.

The other two Commission members arrived on Thursday evening. On Friday morning we met at 9:30 after breakfast and traveled the route through downtown Dallas, stopping at the Texas School Book Depository Building. We did not go inside the building, but rather surveyed the entire area, including standing at the various points in the street where Secret Service estimated the shots struck. In addition, we stood at the point where Zapruder took his pictures, and had with us the 35-millimeter slides from the Zapruder film, with a small battery-operated slide viewer. If the trip were to be made again with other Commissioners, I would recommend getting a somewhat larger viewer which I believe can be obtained at relatively nominal cost, for it was difficult to see details in the slides with the one that we had.

We then walked up behind the fence to view possible shots if an assassin were to be located at those points, and then went to the overpass. The Commissioners were obviously impressed with the topography and the fact that a shot from behind the fence would present a cross-shot which would be infinitely more difficult and also would be confronted with problems of obstructions, including street signs.

From the overpass, the problem would be compounded by the increased distance that any shot would have to travel (at least the first shot, and perhaps the second) and, in addition, the drop in elevation between the overpass and the various positions of the automobile would almost prohibit any shot striking an occupant of the car without going through the windshield--at least this is what appeared to the naked eye.

The Commissioners requested that when measurements are made at the scene they should include, not only measurements from the assassination window, but also the various measurements from the underpass, such as the angle of any shot and whether or not a shot would have to pass through the windshield. In addition, the distance of each shot should be measured from the underpass.

Commissioners Cooper and McCloy then took the route to Parkland Hospital and inspected the emergency room where President Kennedy was taken. From Parkland Hospital we went to the Paine and the Randle homes in Irving for an inspection of the topography. We did not go inside either home. In particular, we examined the location where Oswald was seen carrying the long package and putting the package into the car on the morning of November 22.

After meeting Mr. Dulles at approximately 1:30, we took the bus route and the taxicab route of Oswald on the afternoon of November 22, and then went to the scene of the Tippit shooting. The Commissioners examined the scene from the viewpoint of the different witnesses, and I related from various positions what each witness saw and did. From there, we went to the parking lot where the Oswald light-tan zippered jacket was found.

Then we drove to the vicinity of the Hardy Shoe Store and the Texas Theater. We first went into the shoe-store lobby, where the testimony of Johnny Brewer was reviewed. The Commissioners then walked to the Texas Theater and talked to the ticket cashier, Julia Postal, who was on duty on November 22. Then the Commissioners walked inside and talked to the usher and concessionaire. In both instances I first reviewed briefly the testimony of each of these two witnesses.

We then walked into the lobby and inspected the theater itself, where I explained what took place at the time Oswald was apprehended.

The Commissioners stopped at the residence at 1026 North Beckley Street on the way out to the Tippit scene. After leaving the theater, they went to the Neely Street residence and looked at the place where the picture of Oswald with the rifle had been taken. They also tried to go upstairs to view the bathroom where Oswald was supposedly kept by Marina at the time of the alleged Nixon incident. However, no one was home in the Neely Street residence.

We then went for an appointment with the mayor, who is the chairman of the board of Texas Industries. This was to be a 15-minute courtesy call, but turned out to be something like an hour because the mayor related the background of planning the trip. Among other things, the mayor said that Governor Connally did not want the trip into Texas because of a potential split within the Democratic Party, but rather that the trip was desired by political advisers of the President. Our original schedule was to call at the office of the United States Attorney, which was near our place of meeting with the mayor (at the Republic Bank); in order to conserve time, I invited the staff of the United States Attorney's office over to meet with the Commissioners in the board-of-directors room of the bank, and we met for fifteen minutes with these people.

Then we went to District Attorney Wade's office--he was out of town, but we met with his first assistant, James Bowie, and also with the person who prosecuted Ruby, Mr. Alexander. This was to be primarily a courtesy call. During the conversations, the question of examination of Ruby came up, and the District Attorney's office said that they would be very happy to cooperate with us and had no objections to our examining Ruby. They indicated that within a period of ten days from the date of the meeting the psychiatrists' reports would be complete on whether or not Ruby was competent, and they indicated that they believed all three examining psychiatrists would find him competent.

Finally, we went to the police station to meet the Chief of Police. We also met with Captain Fritz and viewed the places where Oswald was interrogated, as well as his cell and place of arraignment, and took the route of transfer of Oswald down the jail elevator and into the underground garage.

That evening, Dean Storey extended an invitation to the three Commissioners for dinner with a few invited guests. I was also invited, but declined on the assumption that the invitation to me was merely a matter of courtesy and that he would want to keep the group as small as possible.

The next day we met at 8:30 and left for the Texas School Book Depository, where we spent quite a bit of time inside the building. At that time Mr. Truly met us, and the Commissioners requested that Officer Baker, who ran into the building with Mr. Truly shortly after the assassination, also be there. Patrolman Baker came. We first went to the sixth floor and looked out the assassination window. The Secret Service provided a telescopic sight, and the Commissioners each took the position of Oswald and sighted down Elm Street. With us we had the re-enactment pictures of the Secret Service, to show various positions of the car.

We completely went through the sixth floor and looked at the place where Rolling Readers were located and also at the place where the pop bottle and chicken bones were found. We inspected the place where the long paper sack was found. Then we took the route that the assassin took: across the sixth floor and down the stairs.

When we got down to the fifth floor, we went to the place where the three Negro men had been located, and we looked up to ascertain the composition of the floor and the appearance of spaces between the floor and the wall. Then, empty gun shells were dropped on the sixth floor and a bolt action rifle was operated while the Commissioners were at the window, so that they would have an opportunity to learn whether or not those sounds could be heard. I know that Commissioner

McCloy did hear these sounds; Senator Cooper, whose hearing seems to be a little bit below average, said that he could not hear them, although he commented on his hearing problem.

We then went to the windows on the west side of the fifth floor where the three men went shortly after the assassination. It could readily be seen that one could not see the stairway from the west windows because of the obstruction of permanent cabinets.

We then went down to the second floor. In the interim, while coming down from the sixth floor, we inspected the place where the rifle had been found. On the second floor we viewed the lunchroom, and Officer Baker re-enacted what happened at that point. Also on the second floor we encountered Mrs. R. A. Reid, who saw Oswald carrying the coke. We interviewed Mrs. Reid, and then we took the route that the assassin followed down to the first floor. Patrolman Baker and Mr. Truly then re-enacted the scene of their coming into the building and the route they took, including the place where the motorcycle was parked, and the problems encountered running into the building, calling for the elevator, et cetera.

After spending additional time inside the building and inspecting the back entrances, we then went out to the street and took the vantage point of Brennan while a Secret Service agent stood in the window where the shots were fired, so we could see the problems involved in identification. We then went to the point where Arnold Rowland stood, and had a Secret Service agent stand in the southwest corner window on the sixth floor to see the problems of visual sight from the particular location Rowland was standing. Again we went out into the street, where police put up blocks to keep traffic out of the middle lane, while we stood there to see how early the shots could have been fired. From visual observation, I do not believe that the shots could have been fired around frame 190, and I explained to the Commissioners the problems of Governor Connally's testimony that he was not hit by the first shot. From there we went to the spot where Abraham Zapruder had taken his moving pictures, and then went behind the fence to see what kind of a shot could be fired, and then went to the triple overpass. We not only looked at the problems confronted by any potential assassin from the triple underpass, but in addition we pointed out why the motorcade did not proceed down Main Street--there was a median strip which would have necessitated a hairpin turn in order to take the cutoff to go onto Stemmons.

Throughout this period of time we were followed by a group of newspaper reporters, photographers, and television cameramen. We advised them that when we had completed our work we would make a statement. Senator Cooper and Mr. Dulles appeared before a television camera to be interviewed--Commissioner McCloy had already left for the airport to catch a private jet aircraft to go on a hunting trip into

Mexico. The press seemed to be well satisfied. Attorney General Carr, from the State of Texas, was with us on Saturday morning, together with Dean Storey, and both of them were present at the interviews--Attorney General Carr also made a statement in which he said that they had complete confidence in the investigation being carried on by the Commission.

When pressed as to how long it would take to have a report, Senator Cooper said that he would imagine that it would take two to three months of additional work. No one seemed to have any objection at all--everyone seemed to feel that it was most important that the work be done properly, as Senator Cooper said.

I believe that the Commissioners were well satisfied with their visit to Dallas. It is my further belief that this added a tremendous amount to their comprehension of the various problems, as well as the testimony that has been taken before the Commission. In addition, I think that direct contact with Messrs. Bowie and Alexander in the District Attorney's office was very helpful. Also, I believe that from a public-relations standpoint the trip to Dallas was most worthwhile.

I should add several additional sidelights. Allen Dulles has always been intrigued by the Rolling Readers and wanted to get a Rolling Reader to take back to introduce into evidence. Mr. Truly then said that he would give us one, provided that we would autograph a copy for him. Mr. Dulles then wanted a personal copy autographed by everyone, as did Attorney General Carr. We had a ten-minute break inside the TSBD Building on Saturday morning while everyone was autographing various copies of Rolling Readers.

On Thursday night when Commissioner McCloy got in, he went to a newsstand to get a magazine and did not seem to find what he was looking for, so I suggested that he could take a look at our February 25 report in Area II, if he wanted to do some prefatory reading for our work. This he consented to do and, to make a long story short, he read through the major part of the report that night and the following night. He seemed to misunderstand the basic purpose of the report, for he suggested that we did not point up enough arguments to show why Oswald was the assassin. I probably should have stated at the beginning that the purpose of this report was not to show any major conclusions, but rather it was an effort to collect all of the evidence that we could obtain at that date, to be used as a factual basis for further investigation and work. Commissioner McCloy did state that in the final report he thought that we should be rather complete in developing reasons and affirmative statements why Oswald was the assassin--he did not believe that it should just merely be a factual restatement of what we had found.

Finally, I believe that the record should show that we had splendid cooperation from both the Secret Service and the FBI. Inspectors Malley and Kelley were with us at all times. Most of the actual leg work was

done by Secret Service people, but Inspector Malley had men standing by in the event that there might be an occasion to call upon the FBI.

My final recommendation is that the other Commissioners should take a trip to Dallas for personal inspection. I think that some person who is familiar with the area should be with them. This does not necessarily have to be the undersigned, for other staff members are familiar with the area, and also I think that the Secret Service, having gone through this, should be able to answer most questions. If another trip is made, we should make arrangements to view the TSBD Building if at all possible on Saturday morning. Also, I think that it would be helpful to have some of the actual participants there, such as Mr. Truly, Officer Baker, et cetera, if these people cooperate--and I believe that they will be very happy to do this.

Dictated on May 12-13, 1964.

David W. Belin